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POSTSCRIPT

CYCLING CULTURES, CULTURE AND CYCLING

Peter Cox

In his wide-reaching survey of current research into cycling, Harry Oosterhuis observes that a central research question frames much recent work: “why people use or don’t use the bicycle for utilitarian purposes and, consequently, how cycling can be promoted” (2014, p. 20). The authors of this volume are unmistakably part of this trend, bridging academic and policy worlds, struggling on the edges between the (assumed) disinterested analysis of traditional academic perspectives and the active world of advocacy. Collectively, we acknowledge that we each have a standpoint, that in the search for more sustainable and more joyous ways of living we each would argue that the bicycle has a part to play, and one that is not currently fully realized. Of course, this is not to say that we all necessarily agree with each other or share more in our methods and approaches than this common underlying research question. The chapters presented here have emerged from and reflect a range of theoretical perspectives, analyses and experiences, and are part of a broader set of networks of studies which grows rapidly and spans across academic disciplines, as well as linking academia and practice.

Oosterhuis also concludes that in order to further this shared question, “Research into utilitarian cycling would benefit from a new approach that attends to national historical trajectories and national bicycle habitus” (Oosterhuis, 2014, p. 35). While the book overall presents a range of studies from different national locations, they are very much rooted in their own place specificity. And to take the Bourdieusian model further then we can see that the chapters assembled here, in their different ways, work together to explicate different dimensions of habitus: not only the uses and practices of the bicycle, but also the elements of doxa – the accepted beliefs and attitudes – that inform actions and conceptualizations of cycling. To accomplish this, we will also need to cast our gaze beyond the specifics of utilitarian cycling to understand cycling practices that are unconnected to utilitarian uses, and to other cultural processes and practices that shape public understanding of cycling, as the chapters in this volume attest.

The task of this final section is to continue the dialogues opened by the individual contributions in light of the overall concern of the volume, to revisit the chapters and consider how they speak to each other and to the questions raised at the opening of the book. Firstly, it revisits the idea of culture set out in Chapter 1, considering how our understandings of culture help us to read the individual contributions. Secondly, attention will briefly be drawn to each chapter in turn to show how they speak to each other, as well as to elucidate some themes that emerge from the whole project. Thus we also may be able to provide insight into the way in which such very different subject matters as are covered here contribute to the formation of a broader multifaceted narrative. It is a narrative that thinks about cycling not simply as a physical activity, or even as a diverse set of practices, but as a cultural activity, one that forms part of twentieth-century European history, with both a past and future. Cycling is part of culture, not just a culture in its own right.

Across the whole span of the book, we can see three recurrent dimensions of culture. First and perhaps most obvious we can talk about culture as summary behaviour. Particular groups of users forge their own identities and styles. For example, in Bunte’s study (Chapter 7) we are offered an insight into the world of German long-distance randonneurs and shown that it is not only their own self-definition that matters. Unpicking the strands of their practices shows us

not only the contrasts and parallels to other forms of participant cycle sport, but also the high degree of continuity with some of the practices of cycle tourists in the 1930s (Chapter 8).

These images of culture as the collective experiences of particular groups, encourage an almost anthropological gaze, examining the practices of a range of different groups and describing the worlds they inhabit. We might read the identities of cargo bike users (Chapter 6) in the same manner. In the 1890s and early 1900s they signified modernity, a source of pride and celebration as shown in the spectacular Parisian races. When cargo bikes were mundane tools of the retail trade, to be a rider of such machines was of little import. By the late 1950s they were marginalized and the rider a figure of fun. Only when they started being renovated and produced by and among user groups (subsequently spreading to wider markets) did they become a badge of identity – a source of proudly independent status and signifiers of challenge to the values and practices of car-dominated societies. Today's commercial use has to negotiate carefully between these competing images to re-establish itself as the mark of an efficient logistics net.

Whether cycling is marginal or mainstream, it is clear that while we may identify specific sets of practices of cycling with their associated, styles and images, and that these can usefully be analysed in terms of subcultures, homogenization into singular identities, even within these subgroups, is both inaccurate and potentially problematic. Revisiting Shove et al.'s (2012) examination of practices as interactions of competences, meanings and materials (discussed in Chapter 1) assists our interpretations of the activities of subcultures in their formation and in their changing identities over time. Importantly, we can note that practices are not entirely self-determined. The importance of external factors, how meaning is imputed to actions by outside observers, is a vital element of this. Women's cycle touring (Chapter 8) was redefined in the 1950s, not by its practitioners, who carried on their activities much as they had done previously, but because of the changing external realities of gender roles in post-war Britain. The maternalist dimensions of policies (particularly those concerned with welfare) framed around expectations that a woman's place is in the home, assisted a changing climate of expectation around what was appropriate, or even possible, for women (Fielding, 2003).

This brings us to the second dimension of culture: that of context. Meanings are not imputed to practices simply through acts of will or as products of inevitable circumstances, but within the context of wider social structures, political regimes and physical spaces. The political and social dimensions are explicated clearly by Horton and Jones' (Chapter 3), and also form the basis of much of Sabelis' discussion (Chapter 2). But to take the latter of those dimensions, we might ask about the specific contexts in which cycling is taking place. Physical spaces can be made hostile or welcoming. Hostility or welcome are not only produced by physical properties but are also produced by signals and in symbolic form. The mapping of spaces is highlighted by Deegan (Chapter 5) demonstrates that exactly the same space can be conceptualized and communicated in different ways. If a map is a narrative of a space, we need constantly to think about the stories we tell, who are they about? How do the subjects of the stories relate to the world around them? Are they strangers to it, needing survival skills to be taught or does a map provide a guide to one's citizenship? Context also frames the implicit dialogue between Chapters 2, 3, and 4, that between them provide the contrast between the current Dutch and English situations. Divergent policy trajectories over a long time period frame everyday cycling in radically different ways. Place still matters in the human-experience oriented world of spatial mobility by bicycle.

The final dimension of culture is the ideological, contained not just by the political discourses which deal with the subject directly, but the broader signifying practices within society. Which dimensions of activity are seen as important, which held up as desirable and which denigrated? Which groups of people are deemed to matter, to be worth investing in? Although at one level these disparate studies deal with a broad range of topics, this ideological

dimension runs throughout. Subcultures make ideological comment (explicit or not) on the broader contexts in which they operate. Dominant cultures express ideological convictions of their own in order to maintain their dominance. Although the impact of political ideology is most strikingly illustrated by Horton and Jones (Chapter 3) and in the withdrawal of funding for the programmes in van der Kloof's work (Chapter 4), we can see a thread in all of the chapters.

A Kaleidoscopic View

Although writing from a variety of viewpoints, of professional identities and from differing national and regional contexts, the authors here connect through a shared commitment to change. During the meetings that led to this volume, the metaphor of the kaleidoscope was used to describe our view of cycling. Different fragments falling into place are constantly rearranged and the viewer sees how the shifting shapes make patterns. Individual elements overlap and interrelate, and this final section will demonstrate some of the patterns formed out of the interrelations of the different parts of the book.

By focusing on the perceptions of a relatively marginal group within a context where cycling is generally regarded as a mainstream and relatively unremarkable form of travel, Sabelis (Chapter 2) raises the question of how to manage diversity to the benefit of all. She reveals the variety of cycling practices, even within the context of transport and utility cycling in the Netherlands, as complex and politically laden. This complexity is not just a matter of observed diversity of riding speeds and machinery, but of how elements interact in the cycling spaces provided. And in order to comprehend these spaces, one needs to examine the political contexts in which policy is formed. While the Netherlands may have a reputation as a cycle-friendly nation, we can see how local policy is crucial. If we combine these insights with those in van der Kloof's study we can see how this singular image of cycling in the Netherlands conceals a multiplicity of practices and is distinguished not just by the type of riding (Sabelis) but also by age and gender and further by place of origin. Geographic and demographic factors interplay with economic ones to shape cycling practices, and political priorities can be used to both enable and hinder participation rates. The ability of cycling policies to disappear between election manifestos and programmes of action, even where there is a general consensus on the importance of cycling, is also a salutary lesson for those engaged in processes of change.

Sabelis' observation is that the needs of a smaller group, necessarily enthusiasts for their cycling and those who have made deliberate choices to travel differently from the norms of a generally bicycle-positive culture, can have useful lessons for wider inclusivity. But for Horton and Jones (Chapter 3), the attitudes and practices of the cyclist by choice in Britain, are not necessarily the best guide to assess what is needed to open up opportunities to change transport practices. The context is again vitally important. Sabelis' comments are made in a context where fear and insecurity are not significant barriers for the majority. Where they are, in van der Kloof's experience, these fears can be dealt with in an individual context. Her trainees are being sent out into situations where everyday journeys are expected to be made by bike – they are joining in and blending in with the routine everyday practices that see them better integrated into mundane urban life. Objectively, cycling may not be as dangerous in the UK as it is often portrayed, but the reality is that the environment of cycling in most cities is hostile, as Horton and Jones vividly point out. Training people to ride in most of England prepares them to be part of a highly visible minority. Relating this back to social practice theory, the structural contexts and material spaces of the UK and the Netherlands impute very different meanings to practices of quotidian cycling, and the competences required within those structures are also quite different. A further observation that must be reiterated from these three papers is the degree to which all highlight the variety and multiplicity of peoples, practices and understandings that can be hidden behind a simple description of utility cycling.

As well as van der Kloof's presentation of the detailed statistics on cycle use which reveal unfolding stories of social group differentiation, her analysis of the gendered and classed nature of cycling connects with Cox's (Chapter 8) discussion of gender and cycling among British cycle tourists. Here one of the pertinent observations is that emancipator gains made in any particular circumstance are not guaranteed to continue. The liberation provided by the bicycle to the generation of the 1930s was not sustained. Indeed, discourses around cycling reproduced and reinforced the limitation of gender roles enacted in broader social culture. Though some of the achievements and redefinition of women's roles among these cyclo-tourists are deeply progressive, we must also note that these gains were largely focused on a middle-class group of women who were relatively privileged and already beneficiaries from increased educational and social opportunities.

Among Petronella's suggestions (see Chapter 8) for getting a better understanding of where you live and more confidence in your travel by bike, was to take a map and colour in every road after you have ridden it. Deegan's (Chapter 5) consideration of cycle maps and mapping combines thinking about the internalized wayfinding skills that regular riders use in order to navigate, with the politics of (re)presentation inherent in the production of cycling maps. Which routes riders are directed towards creates a narrative of the expected behaviour of the rider, but it also indicates the relation of the mapmaker to the rider. Coding maps to show where there are segregated infrastructure routes, for example, is an immediate indication that route provision is not comprehensive. In the Netherlands and Dutch speaking areas of Belgium, a nodal point system is used on cycling guides, where only junctions are numbered, suggesting that every route connecting these numbered junctions is a suitable space to ride. Connecting Deegan's analysis to Horton and Jones' call for more radical rethinking, perhaps one might suggest that, more than providing maps to show where it is thought appropriate for cyclists to go, the injunction could be reversed. Motoring maps might perhaps more strongly show roads along which not to drive unless absolutely necessary, on the lines of the German *Fahrradstrasse*. The motoring map would become a specialist map, rather than the cycling map, as a subset of general road mapping. A strong ideological statement, perhaps, but in keeping with the radical suggestions made previously concerning the reversal of current cultural norms.

Extending our gaze beyond the utilitarian, Chapters 7 and 8 both explore the worlds of those who deliberately cycle for pleasure. That Bunte's *randonneurs* (Chapter 7) choose to push themselves to the limits of endurance may not immediately resonate with the usual descriptions of pleasure (except in a peculiarly masochistic way). Their actions are nevertheless chosen, and the mobilization of personal resources for training and preparation are common to most amateur sporting endeavours when undertaken seriously: one only has to consider the thousands who train for and participate in marathon running to see this level of dedication elsewhere. Studies of cycling for sport and leisure are not frequently included in discussions dominated by an underlying concern for utilitarian cycling, but their inclusion here reflects both the breadth of cycling cultures and the necessity for comprehending the diversity of practices in a cultural approach to the problems of cycling policy.

While cycling for transport remains negligible in the UK, there has been a marked growth in recreational and sporting cycling, associated with some changes in the public images of cycling. But there remains a tension between the imagery of sport cycling as an activity beyond the capacity of most people (as Bunte shows) that hinders its integration and connection with more mundane cycling practices. The emphasis on making riding of any kind pleasurable, so clearly visible in the 1930s CTC writing on women and cycling (Chapter 8), is one way in which these worlds can be integrated. Properly designed, comprehensive networks of segregated paths clearly ensure that travelling by bike is an attractive option, as the bigger research project in which Horton and Jones participated concluded (Pooley et al., 2013).

The importance of good design in order to include, not exclude, was the starting point for Sabelis' study. One particular core test, which had only just begun to be identified even in the Dutch CROW design manual for bicycle traffic (CROW, 2007) is the usability of facilities by non-standard cycles. Although individual European nations may have their own specific regulations on maximum widths for tricycles, Velomobiles and cargo bikes, especially when carrying loads, will demonstrate whether built infrastructure is inclusive or exclusive. Cox and Rzewnicki's study (Chapter 6) of cargo bikes illustrates how not just bicycle riding but also cycle technologies are tied into society. As proponents of the study of the social construction of technology (SCOT) have long argued, cycles are not simply objects to be interpreted in isolation, but constitute socio-technical systems (Bijker, 1995). Across the chapters we have collectively added space as an important element, either as a technology in itself or as the dimension in which technologies are deployed: whether physically in infrastructure or conceptually as mapping. The integration of cargo bikes into the spaces of cycling, and the challenges they may pose for current assumptions about infrastructure are important elements in planning for sustainable transport futures. Again here we can cross reference Sabelis' (Chapter 2) principle of coping with diversity through inclusivity. Given the degree to which diversity is an integral assumption of many European strategies for increased cycling shares of traffic, we should only expect the growth of cargo bike use to continue.

Multiplicity, Diversity and Complexity

Recognition of multiplicity, diversity and complexity as characteristic of cycling, not just today but historically, and not just in those areas where cycling is a major form of transport or everyday activity, poses questions for Oosterhuis' underlying question cited at the beginning of this chapter. What exactly is being promoted? How can we cope with pluralism and how can the social divisions of ethnicity, class, age and impairment be incorporated into the advocacy process? Our volume cannot hope to respond to all these, neither is its task to do so. But by raising these issues, and exploring some areas and ways of thinking that we consider may be important contributory factors in the addressing of these problems, we begin to assist this process.

Recalling again the image of the kaleidoscope, each image seen is formed from the juxtaposition of selected elements. As individual pieces move around, new patterns emerge. No single volume could hope to provide a comprehensive analysis of cycling cultures nor a complete cultural analysis of cycling in its myriad forms. However, through the presentation of these studies and their juxtaposition within a shared framework we see them in different ways. Similarly, the places and the roles of cycling appear differently as we approach their variety from a range of perspectives.

In linear patterns of thought, diversity and multiplicity become problems, not fitting easily within the frameworks of direct cause and effect: problem analysis, intervention and measurable outcome. Comprehending the issues of sustainability and mobility as forms of complexity however, puts a different perspective on things (Urry 2007). A kaleidoscope is a chaotic system. There is not simple predictability as to how the elements will fall and what sort of a pattern will emerge. Complex problems are not generally amenable to linear solutions, but that does not make them insoluble. Understanding the problems as complex, however, means that the diversity of actions and practices and the multiplicity of ways of looking at them and the worlds of activity with which cycling is connected, are not a hindrance but a necessary part of the solution.

If what we are looking for is as Horton and Jones put it, a plural mobility, then we can perhaps return to the arguments made in Chapter 1. The study of cycling cultures, revealing their complexity, diversity and often contradictory realities and experiences, allows us to discover their interdependencies. The context in which all the authors of the volume met was

that of a broad-based advocacy movement, working for changes to the currently unsustainable – socially and environmentally – patterns of European transport. It has been their differences of outlook and experience that have necessitated consideration of how solidarity is built, not through identification of that which is the same, but across the divides of geography and cultures. Cycling cultures are not simple, unitary identities of uniform groups, but thinking about cycling in terms of culture allows us to better comprehend the implications for policy and practice in moving towards plural mobilities.

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